Species Action Plan

Bats

Long-eared Bats © **Mike Waite**

"*The individuals which are so common in South London, even in thickly populated neighbourhoods like Battersea and Chelsea and Vauxhall, must, I think, be principally the pipistrelle…We see it from the spring months until the early winter, both in our open spaces and in the busy street"* (Johnson, 1930)

This Action Plan is dedicated to the memory of Pete Guest, former Chair and leading light of the London Bat Group, who achieved so much for bat conservation in London before his sad and untimely death in late 2003.

1. Aims

- To reverse the current population declines in London's bats.
- To redress Londoners' misconceptions about bats and secure their status as culturally valued species.

2. Introduction

Bats are highly adapted nocturnal mammals – the only mammals to have evolved powered flight. Often thought of as flying mice, they are in fact more closely related to humans than to rodents, and form a special group of their own: the *Chiroptera*, meaning 'hand-wing'. Bats are generally only seen briefly at dusk and their seemingly furtive nocturnal habits have, over generations, resulted in popular misconceptions and even a

misplaced fear of them. Modern horror stories, films and the media quoting fiction as fact have not helped to improve this tainted public image.

British bats only eat insects. Serving as natural insecticides, they consume huge numbers and variety of prey – a single pipistrelle can eat 3000 midges in a night. With the loss of natural roost sites in trees and woodlands, many bats have adapted to living in buildings. Some favoured Londoners may therefore be surprised to discover these unexpected lodgers for a short period during the summer, when female bats need somewhere warm to raise their young. Their reliance on buildings for roosting greatly

focuses conservation efforts on people's tolerance and goodwill. Bats are an excellent indicator of the quality of our environment, as their complex ecological requirements leave them highly sensitive to environmental changes. Their serious decline should be of major concern to us all.

All of London's bat species are dealt with collectively in this plan because:

- Those currently concerned with the conservation of bats deal with all species;
- All bat species and their roosts are equally protected by law;
- The conservation problems faced by all bats are believed to be generally similar, so measures proposed here are likely to be of benefit to a number of species.

3. Current Status

At least eight species are known to be breeding in Greater London (see Species Audit in the Annex). The two pipistrelles are by far the most common and still occur in all London Boroughs. The noctule and Daubenton's bats are regularly recorded and widespread.

Little is known about the current status of most species nationally, although the available evidence suggests an overall decline in populations. Both the common and soprano pipistrelles are thought to have declined by an estimated 70% between 1978 and 1993 (Harris *et.al.,* 1995).

A recent repeat survey in London found that there has been a statistically significant decline in the bat population of Greater London since the mid-1980s, particularly for the noctule, Leisler's bat and the serotine (Guest *et al*., 2000). Further information on the status of London's bats can be found in the Annex.

4. Specific Factors Affecting the Species

4.1 Loss of maternity roost sites in buildings or trees

Destruction of, disturbance or damage to vulnerable maternity roosts can result from a lack of public awareness and understanding of bats, as well as ignorance of the legislation protecting them.

4.2 Loss of and disturbance to other roost sites

Hibernation and other seasonal roost sites can be disturbed or damaged for the same reasons as above. These sites include buildings (mainly their roof spaces), trees, bridges and various underground structures, such as cellars, tunnels and disused mines.

4.3 Loss of feeding habitats

Changes in land use can result in the loss of insect-rich feeding habitats such as wetlands, woodlands and grasslands.

4.4 Disturbance to commuting routes

Flight paths to and from feeding areas and roosts may be disturbed through the loss of flight line features such as green corridors, or through introduction of new features such as artificial lighting.

5. Current Action

5.1 Legal status

All species of bat are protected in the UK on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000), and on Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations, 1994. The latter further implements European legislation protecting bats. Bats are also protected from cruel ill-treatment by the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act, 1996.

The UK is a signatory to the Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe which came into force in 1994, set up through the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, 1979. While this is not strictly a legal instrument, as a signatory the UK is obliged to abide by such agreements.

5.2 Mechanisms targeting the species

These current actions are ongoing. They need to be supported and continued in addition to the new action listed under Section 7.

5.2.1 Bat wardens

The London Bat Group co-ordinates a network of licensed bat wardens, working in liaison with English Nature to safeguard bat roosts, particularly in houses.

5.2.2 Awareness-raising

The place of bats in London life is promoted regionally, locally and London-wide by organisations such as the London Bat Group, London Wildlife Trust, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Barnes, and Local Authorities through a programme of guided walks, illustrated talks, training and articles. The Bat Conservation Trust, English Nature and the London Bat Group have produced various publications, including a series of specifically targeted leaflets aimed at promoting best practice in relation to bats within the building, pest control and arboricultural professions.

5.2.3 Survey and Research

London Bat Group volunteers participate in national and local surveys and research, including the Bat Conservation Trust's National Bat Monitoring Programme.

6. Objectives, Actions and Targets

Most of these actions are specific to this species. However, there are other, broader actions that apply generically to a number of habitats and species. These are located in

*a separate '*Generic Action*' section which should be read in conjunction with this document. There are generic actions for Site Management, Habitat Protection, Species Protection, Ecological Monitoring, Biological Records, Communications and Funding.*

Please note that the partners identified in the tables are those that have been involved in the process of forming the plan. It is not an exclusive list and new partners are both welcomed and needed. The leads identified are responsible for co-ordinating the actions – but are not necessarily implementers.

Objective 1 To raise awareness among key audiences, specifically planners, land managers and tree contractors

Target: Disseminate best practice advice by 2006

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
1.1 Promote best practice to all major tree contractors/wardens through written letters and the existing Bats In Trees leaflet	Achieved	LTOA	BTCV, BCT, LBG, LA
1.2 Maximise the roosting opportunities for prospecting bats by encouraging land managers and property owners to follow good practice guidelines	Ongoing	LBG	LA, GLA, RP, LVRPA, FC, BTCV
1.3 Encourage appropriate foraging habitat management for bats across London, for example by increasing grant scheme applications	Ongoing	LBG	LA, GLA, DEFRA, FC, RP, LVRPA
1.4 Produce and promote a London Bat Advice Note for all local authority planners	2004	GLA	EN, ALG, WCU
1.5 Conduct awareness survey of tree surgeons/roofing contractors/pest control companies to inform targeted campaign on private sector	2005	LBG	LA, GLA, LTOA, Trade Associations

Objective 2 To increase knowledge of bat distribution and population change

Target: Monitoring programme implemented by 2005; collation of existing data completed by 2004

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
2.1 Collate current and historical records for all bats in London	Achieved	LBG	BCT, LWT, LNHS, EN, RP
2.2 Plan and recruit surveyors for long-term pipistrelle monitoring programme	2004	LBG	BCT, RP, LVRPA, LWT, LA, LNHS
2.3 Pilot implementation of pipistrelle monitoring programme	2005	LBG	RP, LVRPA, LWT, LA, LNHS

2.4 Maintain database of records for all bats in London	Annually	LBG	Records Centre BCT, LNHS, EN

Objective 3 To protect and create new artificial roost sites in association with suitable feeding habitat

Target: Establish 40 new roosting opportunities by 2006

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
3.1 Identify potential sites for roost creation opportunities	2004	GLA	LBG, BCT, LA, LVRPA, RP, CIRIA
3.2 Create new roost opportunities on 40 identified sites	2006	LBG	LA, LDA, TW, WWT, Railtrack, DEFRA, RP, LVRPA, BTCV

Objective 4 To increase public awareness of and involvement in bat conservation

Target: 10 licensed bat workers by 2005; 6 Hibernation Licence holders by 2006; 1 Training Licence Holder by 2005

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
4.1 Maintain co-ordinated programme of guided bat walks, attracting a total of at least 500 people per annum	Annually	LBG	BCT, LWT, WWT, LA, RP, LVRPA
4.2 Maintain programme of event attendance, illustrated talks and popular written articles	Annually	LBG	BCT, LWT, WWT, LA, General Media
4.3 Run training courses in use of bat detectors	Annually	LBG	LVRPA, RP, LA, WWT
4.4 Run training courses for potential leaders of bat walks	Annually	LBG	LVRPA, LA
4.5 Recruit a London-specific bat licence trainer	2005	LBG	EN
4.6 Maintain programme of training for bat box inspection and roost visitor licences	Annually	LBG	EN, LA, LVRPA, RP

Objective 5 To make a significant contribution to urban bat conservation through new ecological research

Target: One research topic completed and disseminated by 2008

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
5.1 Complete a desk-top study of current research on artificial light and mammal ecology	Achieved	LBG	BCT, EN, LWT, GLA
5.2 Commission and complete new research into links between bat ecology and artificial light	2005	LBG	LBP, BCT, Universities

Relevant Action Plans

London Plans

Woodland; Tidal Thames; Canals; Private Gardens; Wasteland; Reedbed; Churchyards and Cemeteries; Parks, Amenity Grasslands and City Squares; Open Landscapes with Ancient/Old trees Audit.

National Plans

Built Environment and Gardens; Pipistrelle bat.

Key References

Harris, S., Morris, P., Wray, S. & Yalden, D. (1995). *A Review of British Mammals: population estimates and conservation status of British mammals other than cetaceans.* JNNC, Peterborough.

Johnson, Walter. FGS. 1930. *Animal Life in London*. The Sheldon Press, London.

Guest, P, Jones, K E and Tovey, J. (2002). *Bats in Greater London: unique evidence of a decline over 15 years*. British Wildlife, 14 (1).

JNCC (2003). *Bat Worker's Manual - 3rd Edition.*

Mickleburgh, Simon (1987). *Distribution and status of bats in the London area*: The London Naturalist, no.66. LNHS

Abbreviations

ALG – Association of London Government
BCT - Bat Conservation Trust
BTCV – British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
CIRIA – Construction Industry Research & Information Association
EN – English Nature
FC – Forestry Commission
GLA – Greater London Authority
LBG - London Bat Group
LBP – London Biodiversity Partnership
LNHS – London Natural History Society
LTOA – London Tree Officers Association
LVRPA – Lea Valley Regional Park Authority
LWT - London Wildlife Trust
RP - Royal Parks
TW – Thames Water

LA – Local Authorities (inc. Corporation of London)
LDA – London Development Agency
WCU – Wildlife Crime Unit (Metropolitan Police)
WWT - Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust

Contact

The Lead for this Action Plan is the London Bat Group.

Please note that although the London Bat Group will co-ordinate these actions on a London-wide scale with the support of the Partnership, it unfortunately cannot currently resource action at a Borough or Local Level.

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Annex

London Bat Audit

Species		UK Status	London Status	Notes
Greater horseshoe bat	*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*	Endangered	Extinct	Last Greater London record from Oxleas Wood in 1953.
Lesser horseshoe bat	*Rhinolophus hipposideros*	Endangered	Extinct	Last Greater London record from Abbey Wood (Woolwich) in 1952-3.
Whiskered bat	*Myotis mystacinus*	Vulnerable	Rare	Due to difficulty in separation, these are considered together. Found in small numbers in outer London Boroughs such as Hillingdon, Richmond, Bexley and Bromley.
Brandt's bat	*Myotis brandtii*	Vulnerable	Rare	
Natterer's bat	*Myotis nattereri*	Vulnerable	Scarce	Relatively few records in Greater London. Most central location is Highgate Wood and Hampstead Heath, otherwise Richmond and Hounslow and other outer London Boroughs.
Daubenton's bat	*Myotis daubentoni*	Not Threatened	Frequent in certain areas	Relatively common and strongly associated with ponds, lakes & rivers. Roosts in trees have been found on Wimbledon Common and Ruislip Woods, and another is believed to be in Crystal Palace Park.
Serotine	*Eptesicus serotinus*	Vulnerable	Rare	Serotines are found in outer London Boroughs especially Bromley, Havering, Sutton and Richmond. Roosts are known from Bromley and Teddington, and are suspected in Sutton.
Noctule	*Nyctalus noctula*	Vulnerable	Widespread	Regularly recorded throughout Greater London, but their high mobility may give a false perception of status; in fact there are indications of a rapid decline locally. A number of tree roosts have been found at sites including Crystal Palace Park, Regents Park and Ruislip Wood.
Leisler's bat	*Nyctalus leisleri*	Vulnerable	Scarce	A few Leisler's bats have been recorded in the Greater London area, and the species appears to be most frequent in the east. A roost was found in the Aveley area just outside Greater London in 1987; two dead bats were found in Highgate Woods in 1986; and a female and infant bat were recovered in Bexley in 2003.
Common pipistrelle	*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*	Not Threatened	Common	Recently split into two species, these pipistrelles are by far the most common bats in the UK and both species are widespread in Greater London.
Soprano pipistrelle	*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*	Not Threatened	Common	
Nathusius's pipistrelle	*Pipistrellus nathusii*	Rare	Rare	Only recently confirmed as a UK breeding species. There are bat detector records from Lesnes Abbey Woods, Chislehurst Ponds and the Wetland Centre at Barnes. One was found in the City in 1989, and the species is now regular in bat boxes in Hounslow.
Brown long-eared bat	*Plecotus auritus*	Not Threatened	Scarce	Brown long-eared bats are fairly secretive and so are probably under-recorded in Greater London. Roosts are known from Bexley, Bromley, Hillingdon, Wandsworth, Kensington & Chelsea, Barnet, Richmond.

Data Limitations

This audit is based on data from the London Bat Project collected in the mid-1980s, as well as that collected since by the London Bat Group and is therefore not systematic. This audit is the best possible understanding of the status of bats in London that can currently be realised by the London Bat Group.

In general, every borough will have bats present, as even in the inner boroughs there are usually some areas of suitable habitat that can provide feeding habitat for small numbers of at least the common pipistrelle species. In general, the outer boroughs with larger areas of more suitable habitat should be expected to have higher numbers of bats and a greater diversity of species.